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HEPCATS

martin wagner

4



HMMM...LATE AGAIN, ARE WE?

Yeah, yeah, yeah. This time it is my fault, though. To wit, we aren't used to subzero temperatures down here in the Lone Star State, and when the Arctic freeze slammed into us in December, it left me and Tif—along with several million other Texans—with murderous colds that turned us into Sudafed Zombies for the better part of the entire month. *C'est la vie*. Anyway, I've plunged into issue 5, so look for a slightly more reliable bi-monthly schedule here on out. Really. Barring catastrophic illness, of course.

LANSING, ILLINOIS II: THE SEQUEL

Re-e-eally creepy.

See, all this obscenity trial news and moral watchdoggery that has grown into hysteria in Reagan/Bush's Amerika scares me, too. But it doesn't scare me so much that I'm unable to joke about it, which was the point of the whole "Lansing, Illinois Fan Search" thing in *Hepcats* I.

It was all in this vein: my distributors were promoting my book to dealers by saying, essentially, that it might appeal to "fans of serious storyline animal comics like *Omaha the Cat Dancer*," a book that everyone knows by now was a key title brought up as evidence in a legal circus we fondly call the Friendly Frank's trial (and, not long after, Canada's farcical Comics Legends trial). Which, naturally, led my whacked mind to think, *Hmm, well, that could lead some dealers to avoid the book, thinking it's another explicit-sex-with-animal-people book*. But minutes later, I thought, *Naah, that's silly*, and set about making a joke of my own overreaction.

Well, humor as regards serious subjects is often lost on people, I know. Some people, bizarrely enough, took the page seriously, and some even thought I was *really selling U. S. Constitution bikinis!* However, by and large, I know *Hepcats* fans are a really sharp bunch of people and I'm sure most folks took the page in the spirit in which it was intended, though I guess I should apologize to anyone I threw into utter confusion.

But I must admit, there has been a certain *lack* of response that has had me a bit surprised.

I haven't gotten a single letter from Lansing.

Now, I know there could be any number of reasons for this. Maybe Lansing residents read the page, took offense instead of taking the joke, and wrote me off as a wiseass sumbitch. Still, I *have* gotten several letters from other cities in Illinois, and none of them have been angry in tone, and several of them have pointed to the realities underlying my antic assertion that maybe, just maybe, as *WAP!* rather tactlessly suggested, Lansing is populated by rightwing bluenosed fascist brownshirts. Particularly surprising was the letter from Gary Akins of Rockford (in this issue), who informed me that a recent attempt to buy *Omaha* #12 in that city revealed that the dealer had to keep it not under the counter, but in the back room, for fear of being run out of business.

Yes, that is bizarre. Which leads me to believe my second reason for why I haven't gotten any letters from Lansing: no one there is likely carrying *Hepcats*.

If I'm wrong, I'd like to know. Because Illinois orders on the whole have been overwhelmingly my highest, and Illinois fan mail has been overwhelmingly my most prevalent. Could be nothing at all.

Like I said. S'weird.

A recent event in Austin drove these thoughts home in such a way that I was perfectly able to rationalize procrastinating on the art in this issue, and write this copy today. See, in Austin we've got this big supermarket chain called H.E.B., and we've also got ourselves a cool alternative free weekly paper called the *Austin Chronicle*. Well, recently the latter ran afoul of a fellow by the name of Mark Weaver, *steppenführer* of the local chapter of Rev. Donald Wildmon's fundamentalist hatemongering and bigotry club, disingenuously known as the American Family Association.

Weaver—who has displayed his loathing of adult book stores by hanging out in peep shows, taking pictures, and amassing what is rumored to be the largest private collection of hardcore pornography in the county, strictly for research, of course—approached an H.E.B. manager and asked if it were appropriate for a

"community" store to be carrying a free paper with homosexually-oriented personal ads in the back, whereupon said manager "reviewed" the publication and, indeed, found it failed to meet their "standards for a free publication" (one assumes H.E.B. will *sell* you all the gay ads you want). Weaver, apparently, doesn't think the restaurants and other shops that carry the *Chronicle* with his blessing serve the "community."

H.E.B.'s claims that it dropped the *Chronicle* on the grounds of not wanting to offend public morality were, of course, such a pile of shit it boggles the mind. The truth, of course, was that Weaver and his stormtroopers are known for forming picket lines and generally being a pain in the ass; that such lines would hurt not only H.E.B.'s image as a bulwark of White American wholesomeness but also—all together now—*sales*; hence, this city's most intelligent and provocative newspaper lost a significant outlet for distribution. At least it only lasted two weeks; public outrage brought H.E.B. to their senses.

Also particularly charming were the responses from those who supported Weaver. Out of the bags of mail the *Chronicle* received, supporting them and telling them to fight the good fight and all that, there were two erudite letters that cheered Weaver and his boy scouts on. One writer called the *Chronicle* staff a bunch of "baby murderers"; another fellow was moved to write, in a WASPish flurry of patriotism: "[H.E.B. and Weaver] deserve a big thanks for ridding the city of you motherfucking scumbag cocksuckers...not one penny of my money is going to [AIDS] research. I'll be laughing my ass off while all you queers and dopers die a horrible death. Signed, Mr. America." It is, wouldn't you agree, a comforting glimpse into the minds of those who stand up for all those timeworn, traditional values that make our country great. I don't know about you, but I feel a *hundred* times safer knowing there's folks like him out there to make for me all those troubling personal decisions about my life, what I read, watch, etc., that I can't make for myself 'cos I'm a grown adult, you know?

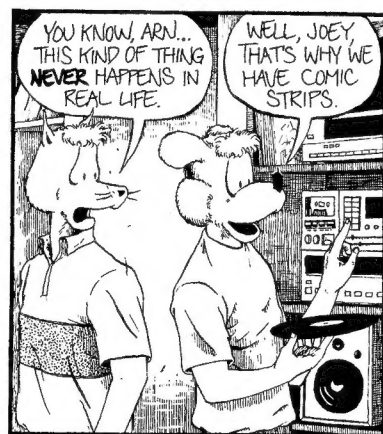
(Addenda: Darrel L. Boatz, associate editor of *Comics Interview*, sought to straighten me out on one nefarious boo-boo I made on the "Fan Search" page, during one of his many calls which preceded the interview itself. I was, it seems, wrong to write "Illinis"; there's no "s." "Illini" serves as both singular and plural, and it has its origins as an old Algonquin Indian word that means, simply, "the men." Now can I be cover boy, Darrel? Pleeeeeaze! Aw, phooey.)

LOOK OUT! IT'S 1990!

In closing, I wanted to pass along thanks to everyone who sent Christmas cards. Particularly Walter Lyzohub of Redford Township, Michigan. Poor Walter. He must think the Fame Thing has swallowed me alive or something, because, instead of any standard holiday salutation or anything like that, his only written comment inside the card was a sheepish, "I hope you don't mind getting a card from me." Well, you little people do step over the line sometimes, but I'll forgive you this once.... Walter, Walter, Walter! Happy New Year, big guy!

Also, major belated thanks to David White of Cupertino, California. A lot of folks offered their congratulations on the Wagner nuptials, but David went to the trouble to go and get a card, and that was real nice. Thanks, David.

Anyway, me and Tif and the whole cast wanna wish everyone a Happy New Decade! None of this *fin de siècle* bullshit for us; we want everyone to have all the peace and happiness and freedom in the world in the 1990's—particularly the people of East Germany, Romania, and Czechoslovakia!



CREATED BY MARTIN WAGNER • NUMBER 4 •
A NOVEL IN 18 CHAPTERS • *building*

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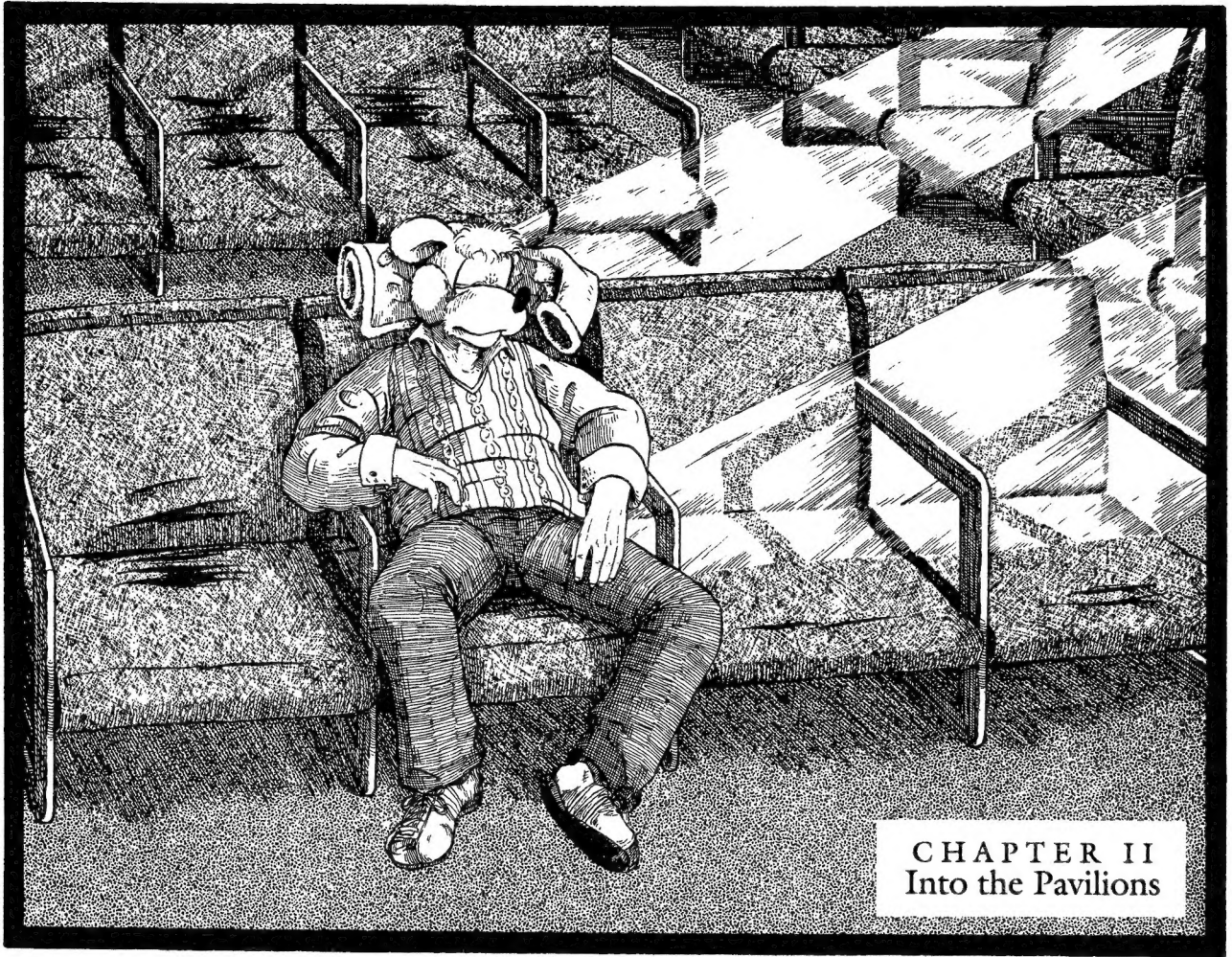
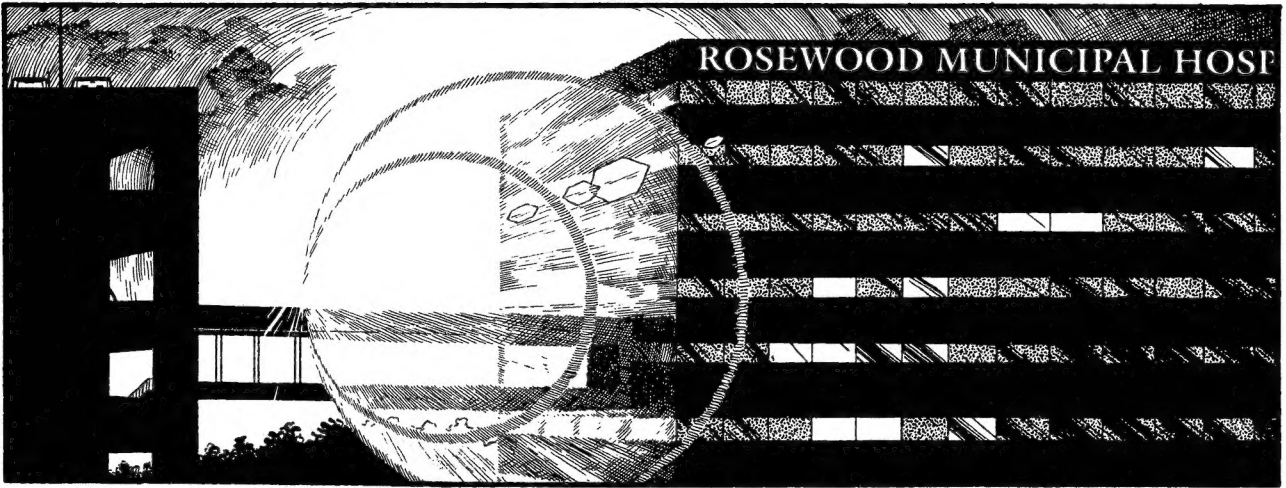
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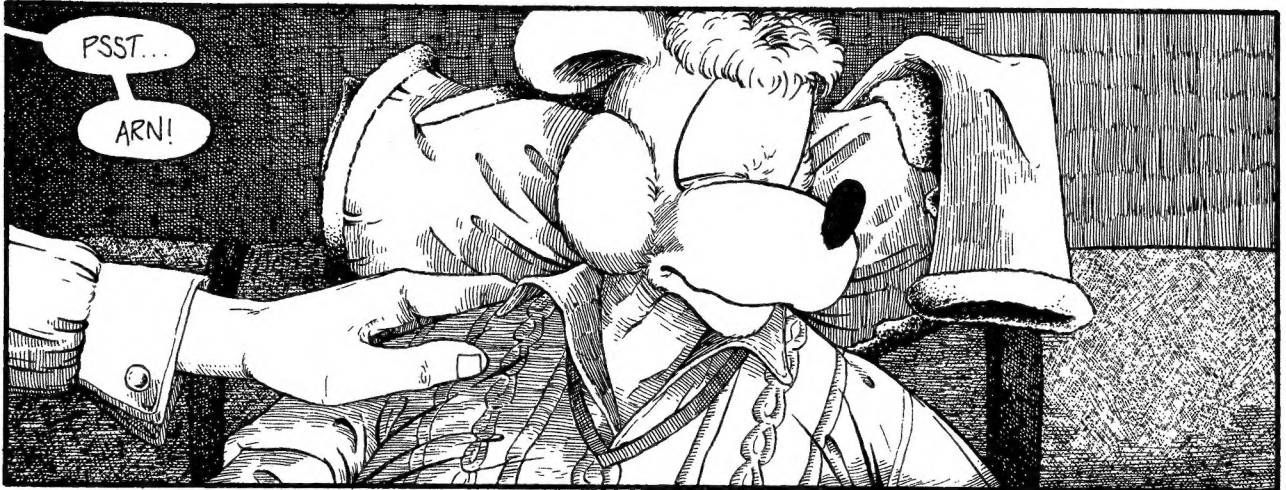
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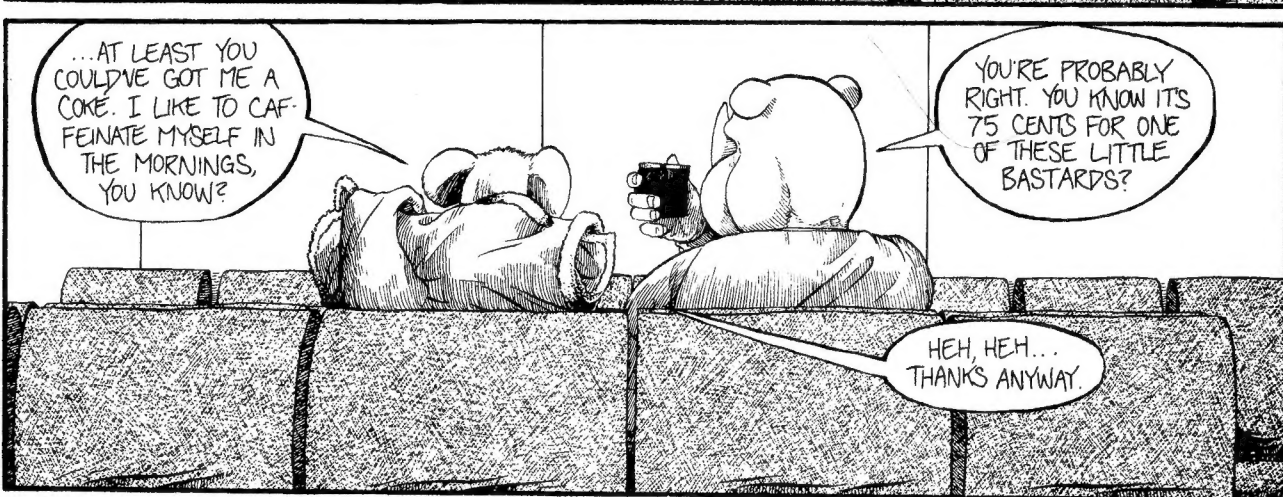
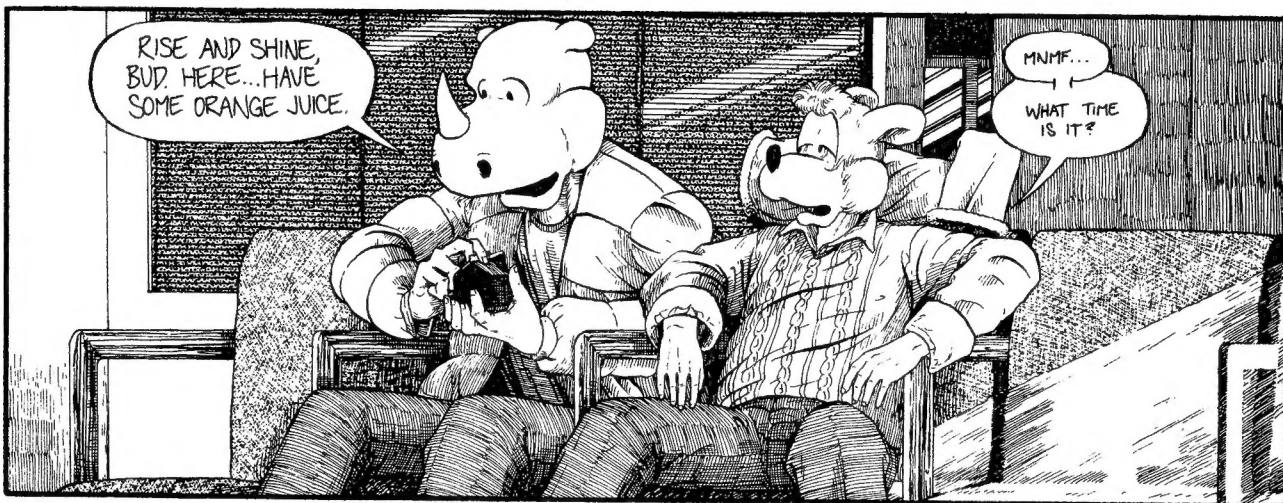


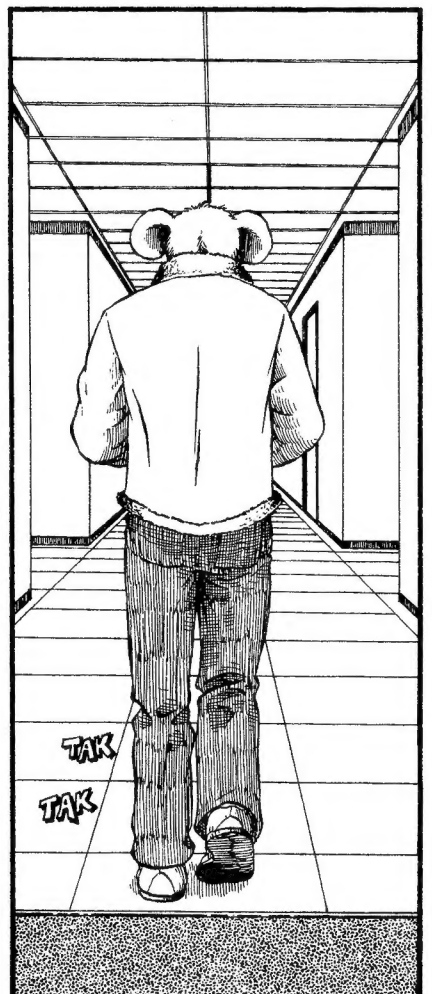
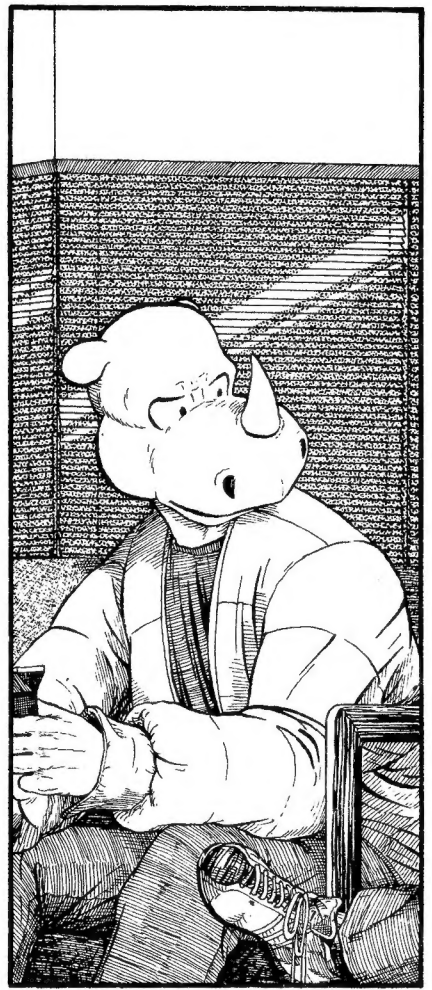
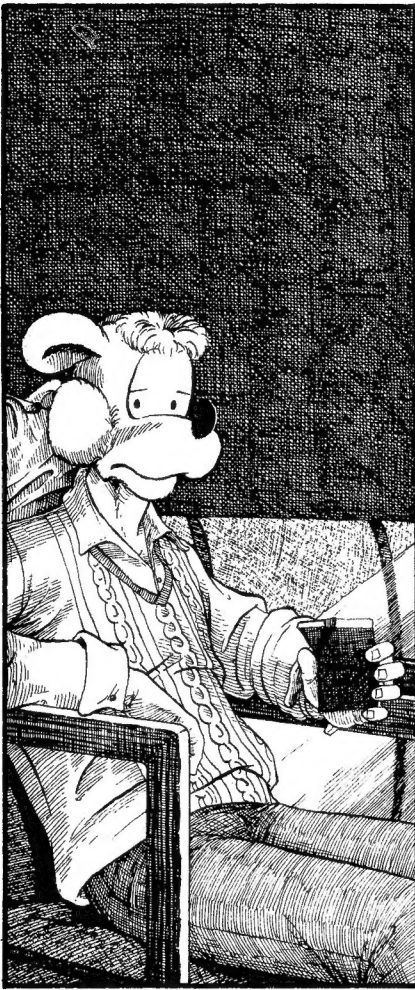
CHAPTER II
Into the Pavilions

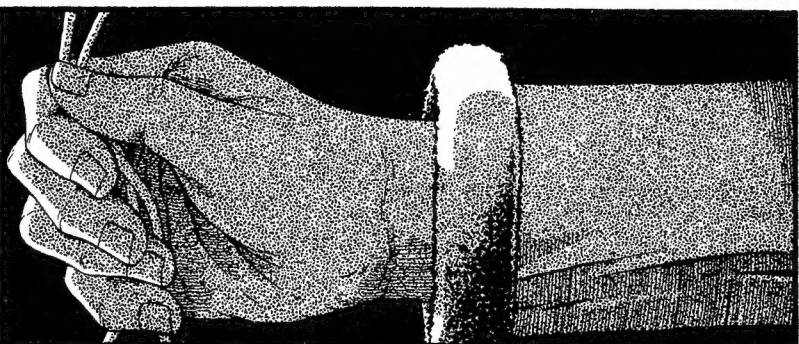
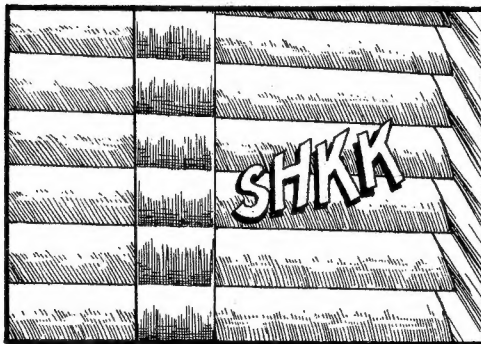
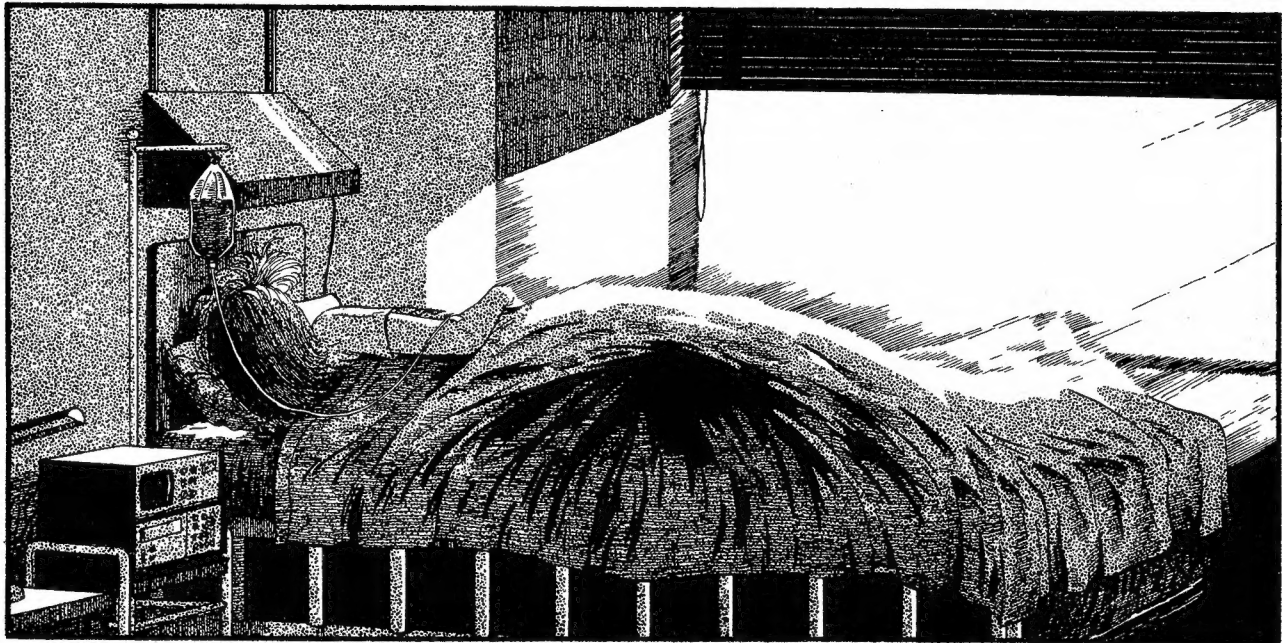
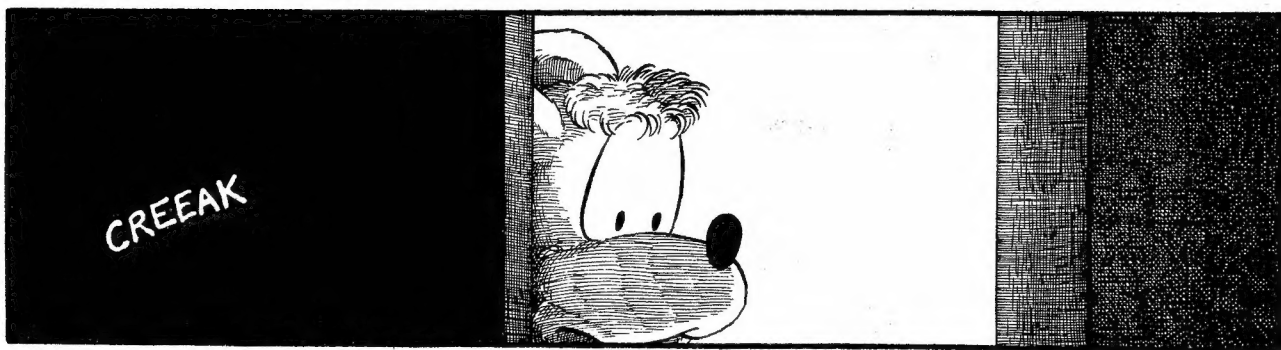


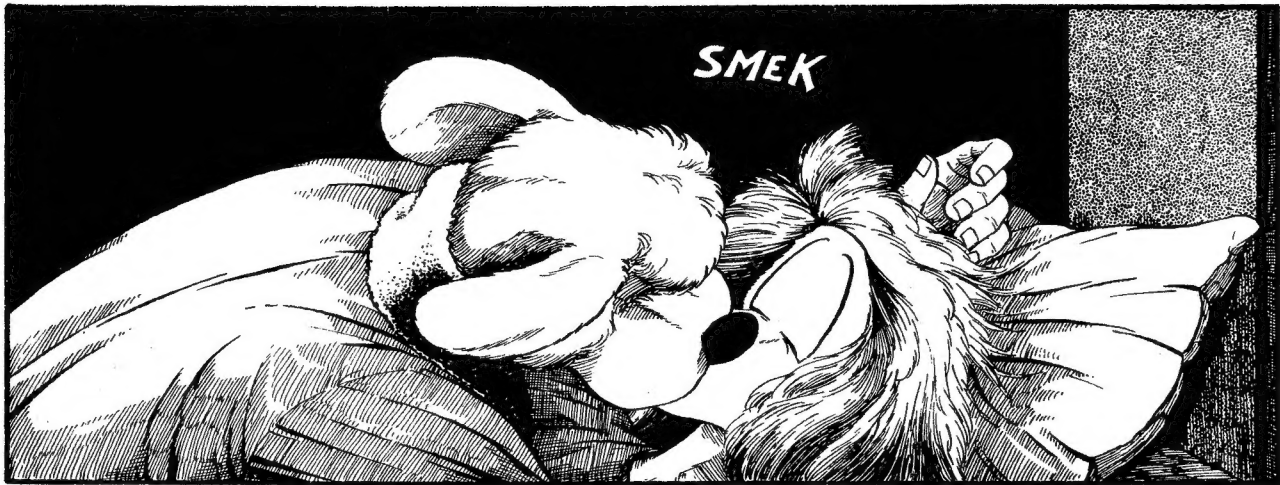
PSST...

ARN!









GOD **DAMN** IT!

THAT'S TWICE THIS WEEK
I'VE TURNED THIS DAMN ANKLE!

OH I'VE BEEN PRACTISING SOME MOVES
A DANCER FRIEND OF MINE FROM NEW ORLEANS
NAMED MADELIENE TRIED TO TEACH ME WAY
BACK.

I'VE NEVER BEEN ABLE TO
DO HALF THE STUFF SHE DID.

AND THESE FEET HAVEN'T QUITE
BEEN THE SAME SINCE I'VE BEEN
IN THE HOSPITAL.

BOURBON STREET DANCING CAN GET
PRET-TY WILD, IF YOU'VE NEVER SEEN IT.

I MEAN, WE SWING FROM THE RAFTERS,
TWIRL AROUND THE POLE UPSIDE DOWN—
DO STUFF YOU'D HAVE TO SEE TO BELIEVE.
ANYTHING FOR A FUN SHOW, RIGHT?

THERE WAS ONE GIRL
WHEN I WAS THERE WHO
CALLED HERSELF "AURORA."
I DIDN'T KNOW HER WELL,
BUT MADELIENE DID.

WELL, ONE NIGHT—AND I GUESS SHE MUST
HAVE BEEN COKE'D OUT OF HER MIND BECAUSE
SHE SAID SHE NEVER FELT IT—AURORA WAS
SWINGING FROM THE RAFTERS WITH ONE HAND,
AND SHE LOST HER GRIP AND FLEW INTO A TABLE
WHERE SOME FOOTBALL TEAM WAS SITTING.

SHE DID A SOMERSAULT IN MID-AIR. IT WAS WILD.

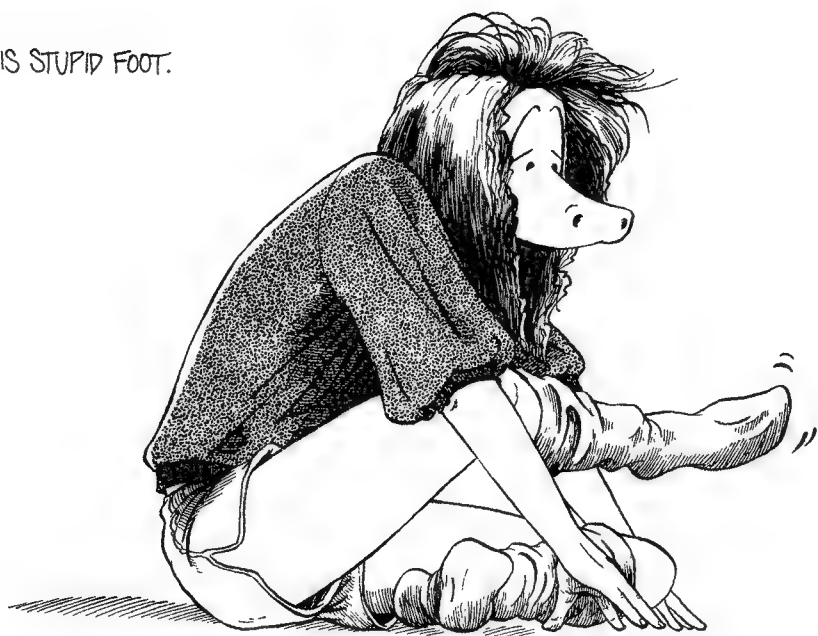
SHE BROKE THREE RIBS AND CRACKED HER PELVIS.
BUT SHE KEPT WANTING TO GET BACK ON STAGE AND
FINISH HER SONG...

AURORA WAS ALWAYS FUCKED UP ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, THOUGH...

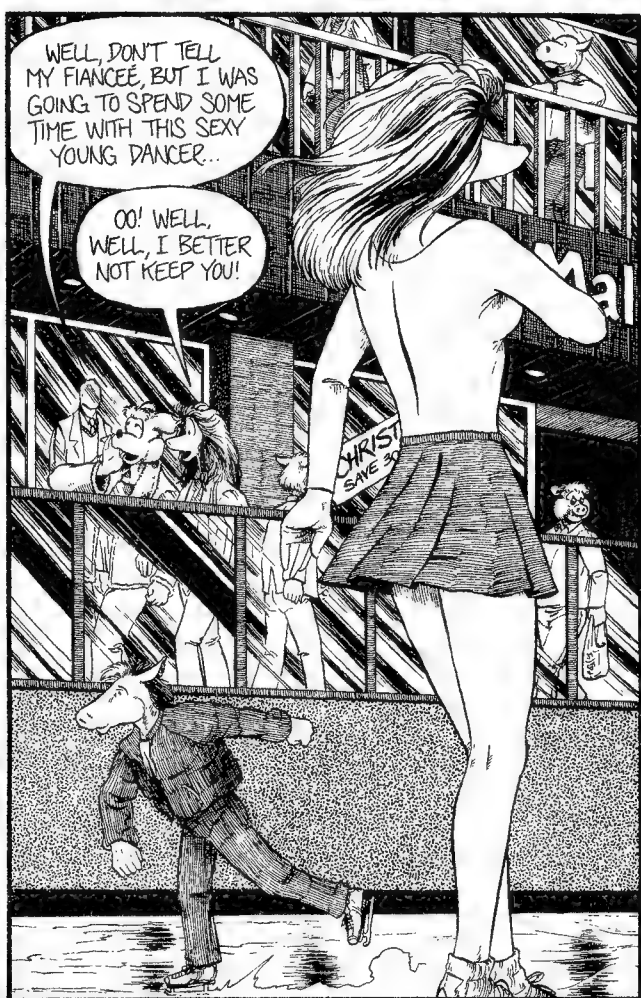
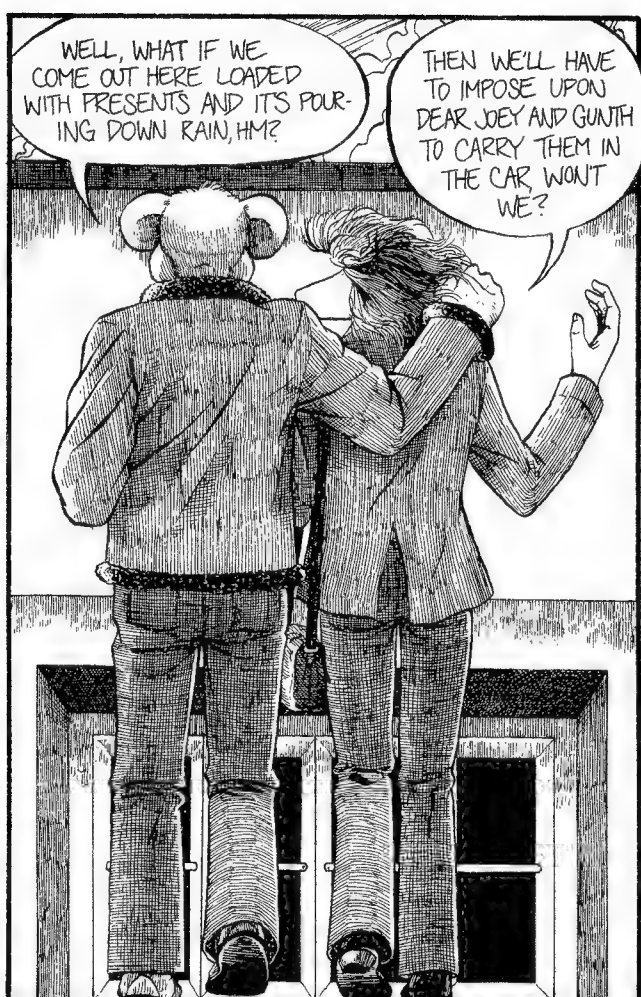


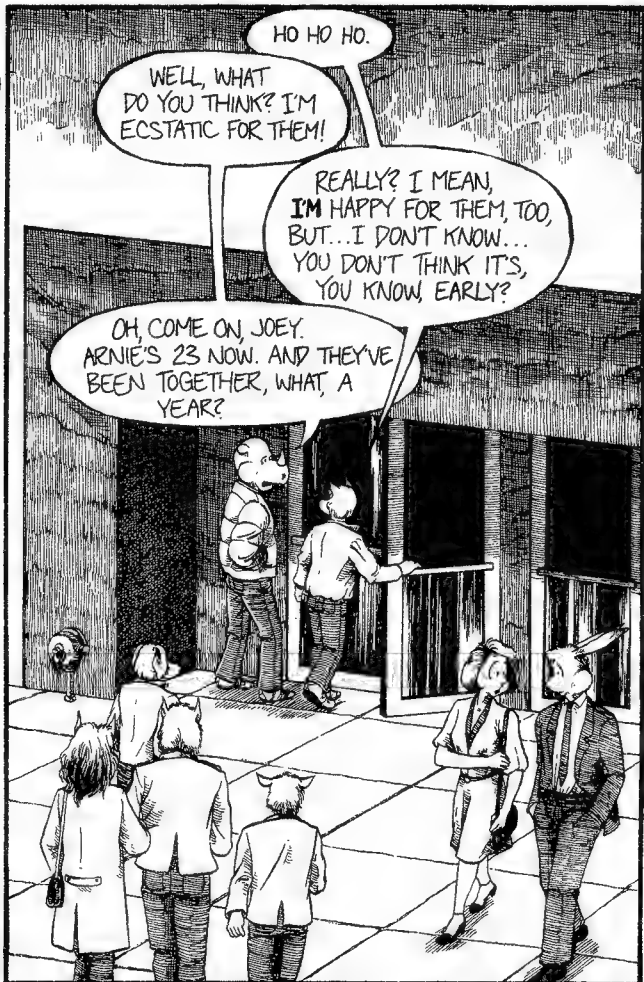
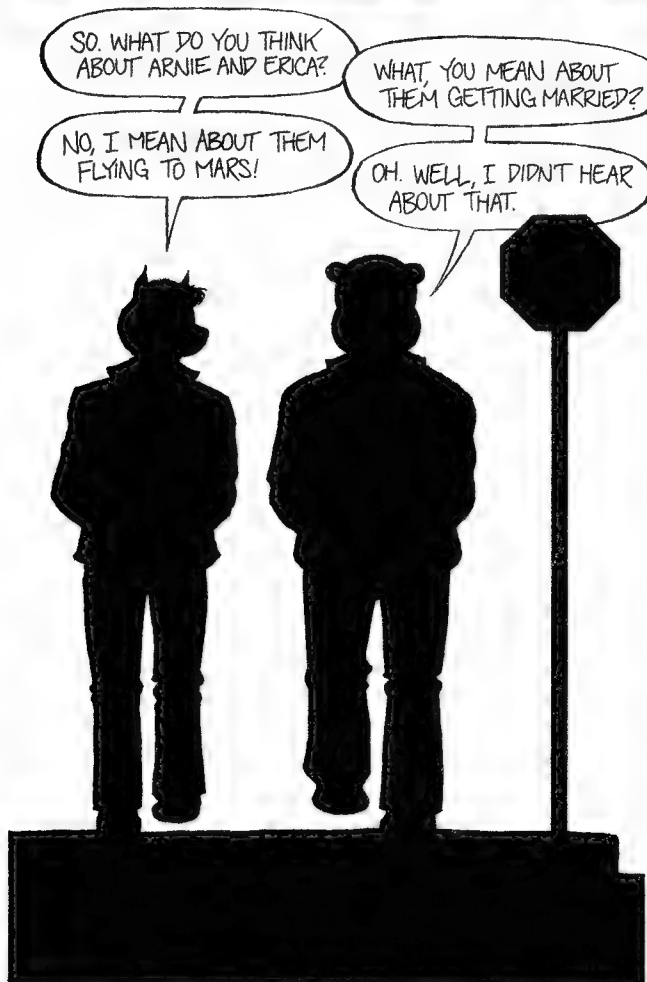
I WONDER WHY I THOUGHT OF HER JUST NOW?

MUST BE THIS STUPID FOOT.











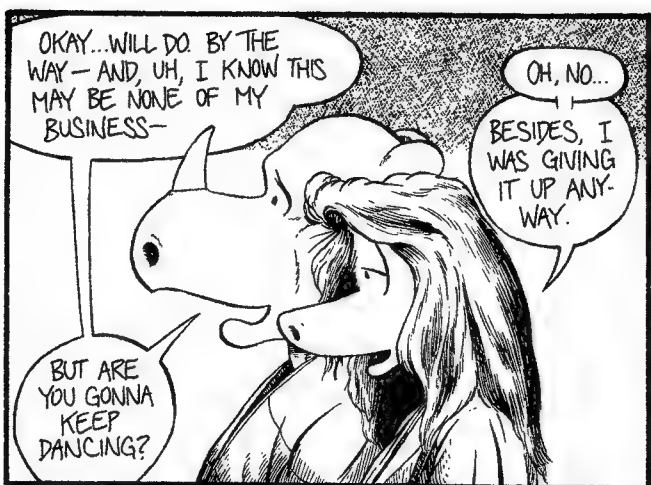




ALL RIGHT, SO TELL ME. HOW TERRIFYING IS IT TO BE A BRIDE-TO-BE?

OH, GOD, GUNTHER! GIVE ME A LITTLE TIME HERE, OKAY?

ASK ME ABOUT TWO DAYS BEFORE THE WEDDING.



OKAY...WILL DO. BY THE WAY—AND, UH, I KNOW THIS MAY BE NONE OF MY BUSINESS—

OH, NO...
BESIDES, I WAS GIVING IT UP ANYWAY.

BUT ARE YOU GONNA KEEP DANCING?



REALLY? BUT I THOUGHT YOU LOVED DANCING....

SURE I LOVE DANCING.

I JUST DON'T LOVE TITTY DANCING. AT LEAST, NOT LIKE I USED TO. THINGS'VE REALLY CHANGED.



LET'S JUST SAY THAT I'M NOT WHERE I THINK WORKING MY BUTT OFF SO A HANDFUL OF SWEATY GUYS TWICE MY AGE CAN STICK A DOLLAR IN MY WAISTBAND IS PERSONALLY FULFILLING ANY MORE.

GOTCHA.



...YOU KNOW, THE CLUBS HERE JUST AREN'T FUN LIKE THEY ARE IN NEW ORLEANS.

AND BESIDES, I GOT SCHOOL AND CAREER AND ARNIE TO THINK ABOUT NOW.

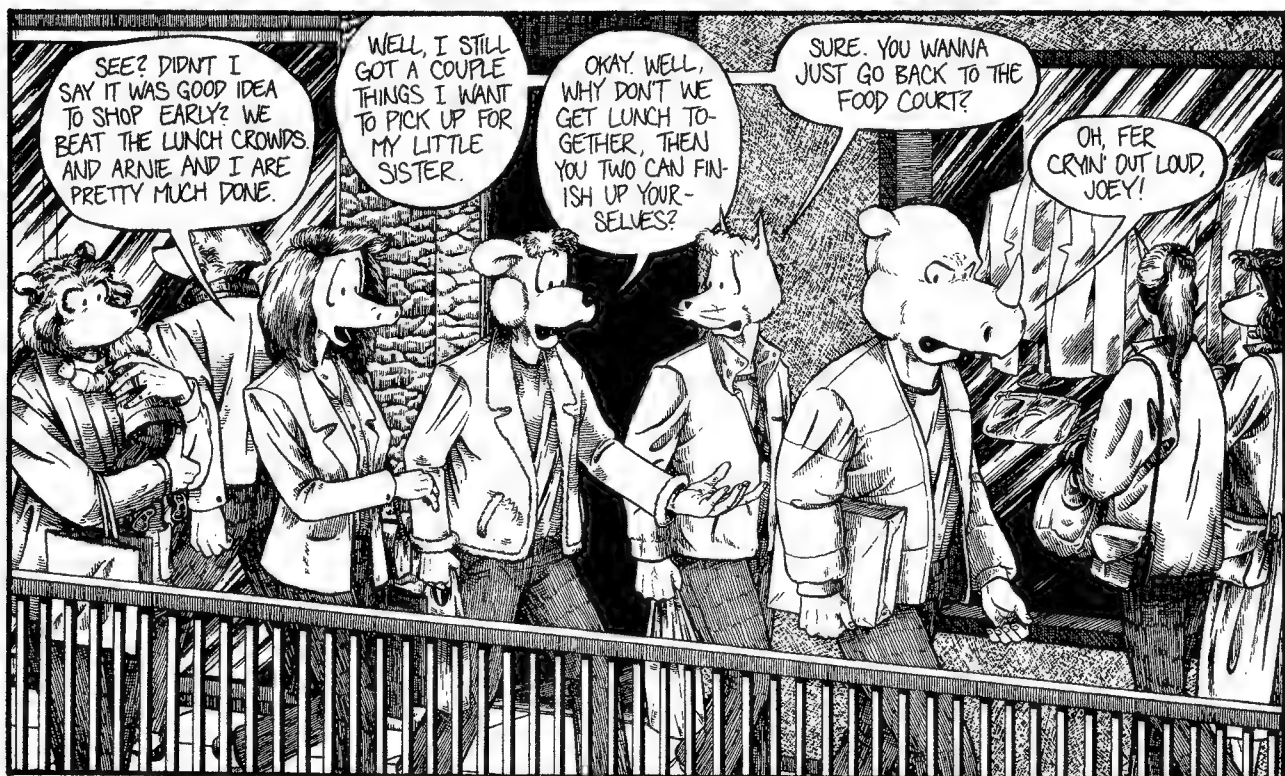
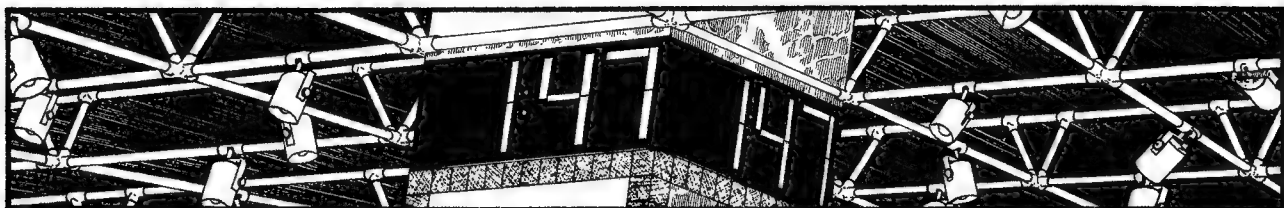
SO I FIGURE I'LL GET OUT OF THIS BUSINESS...

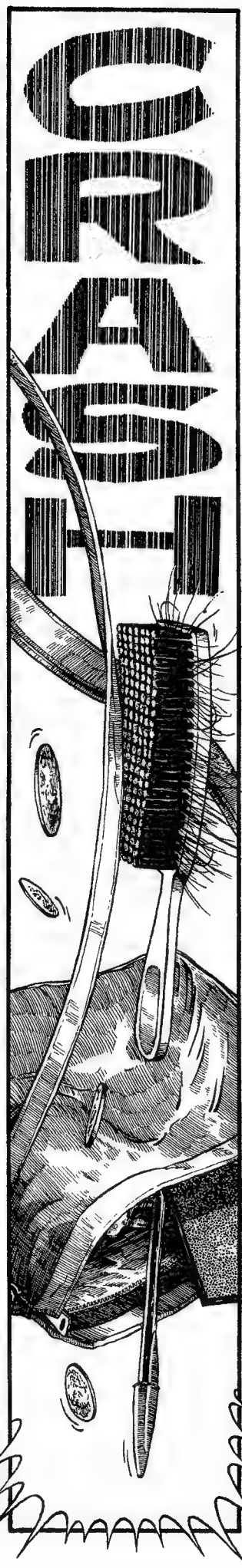
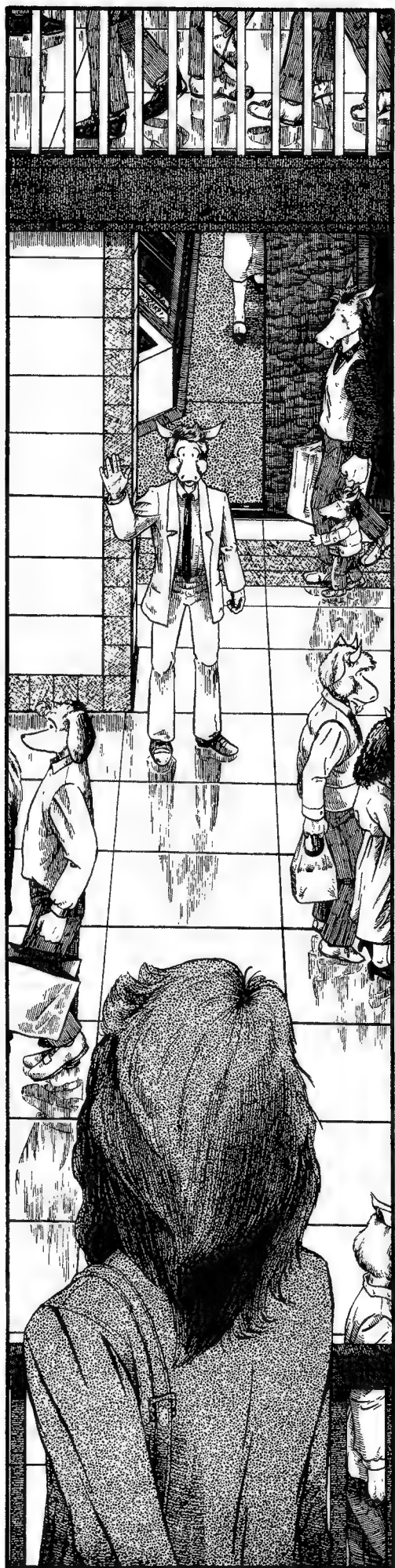
BEFORE IT SCREWS MY MIND UP.

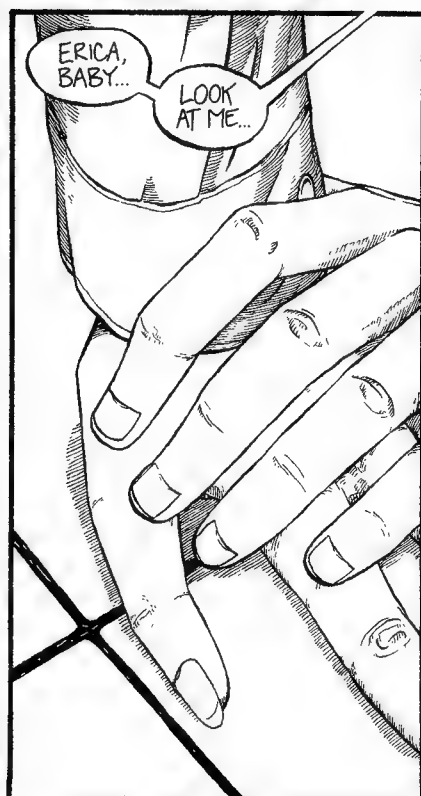
OOO-KAY.

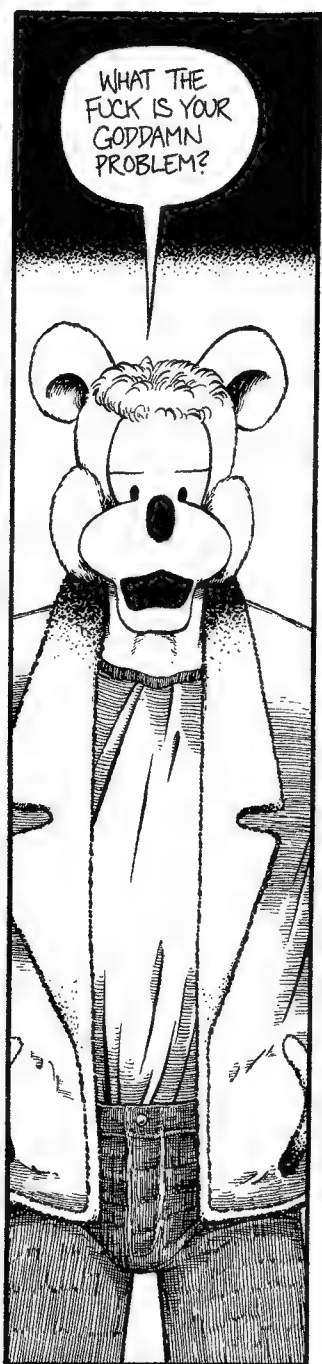
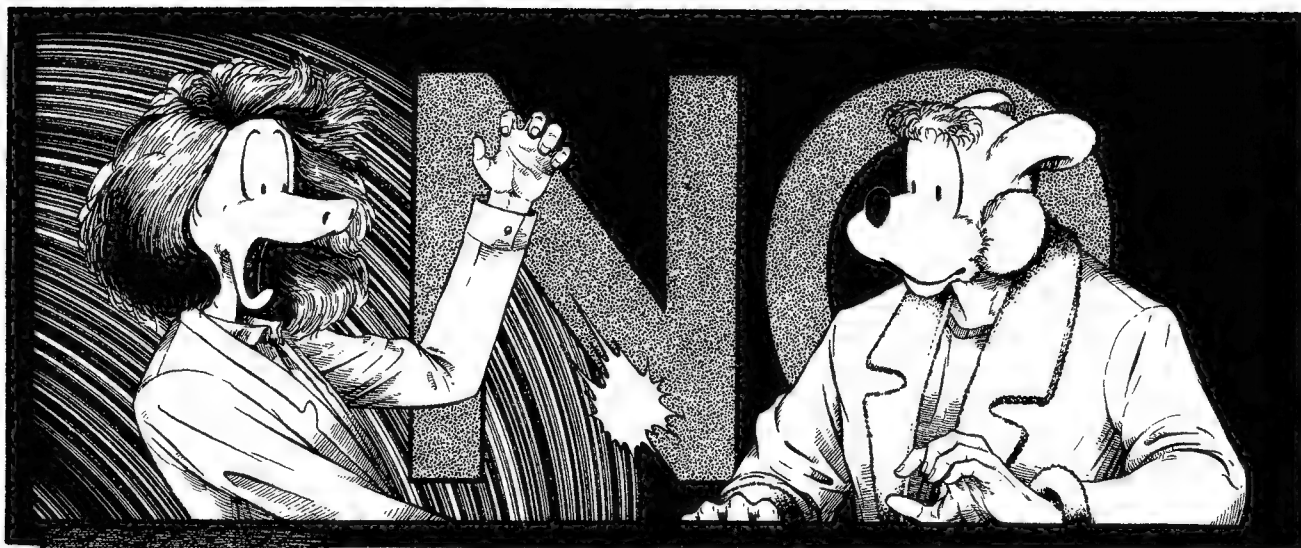






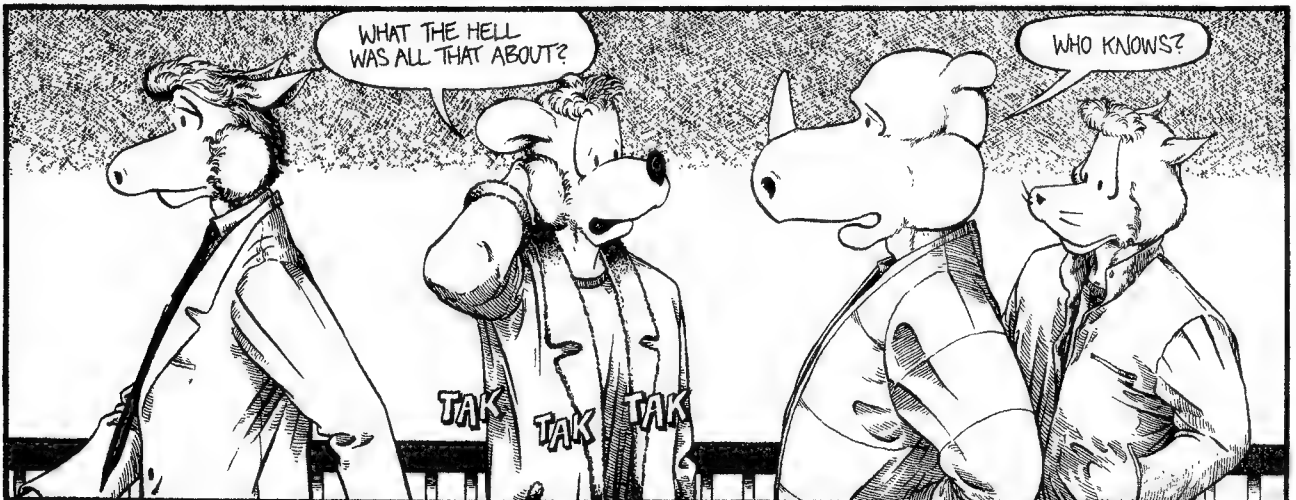
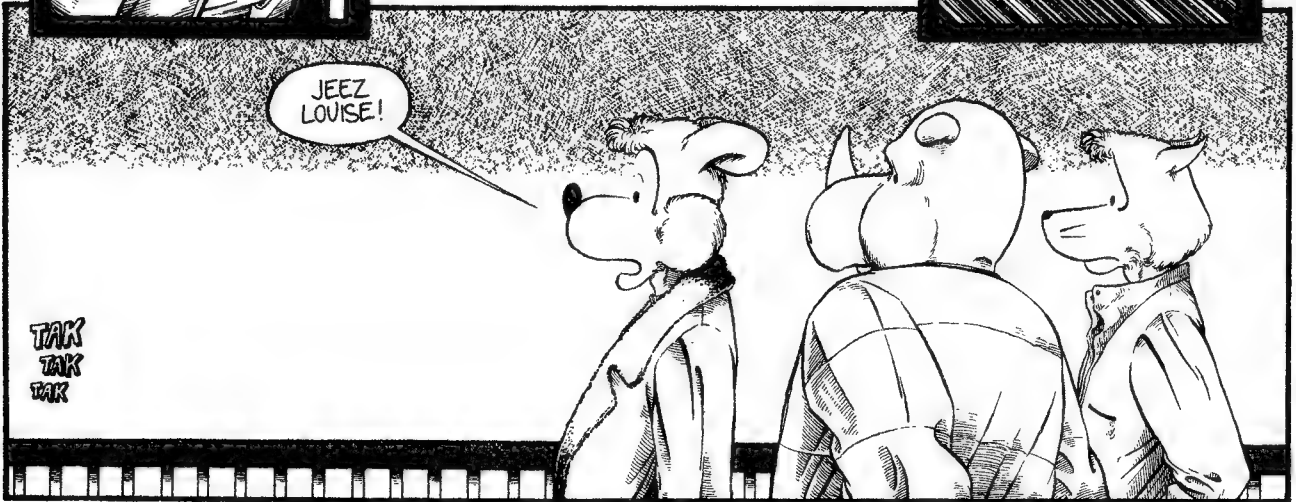
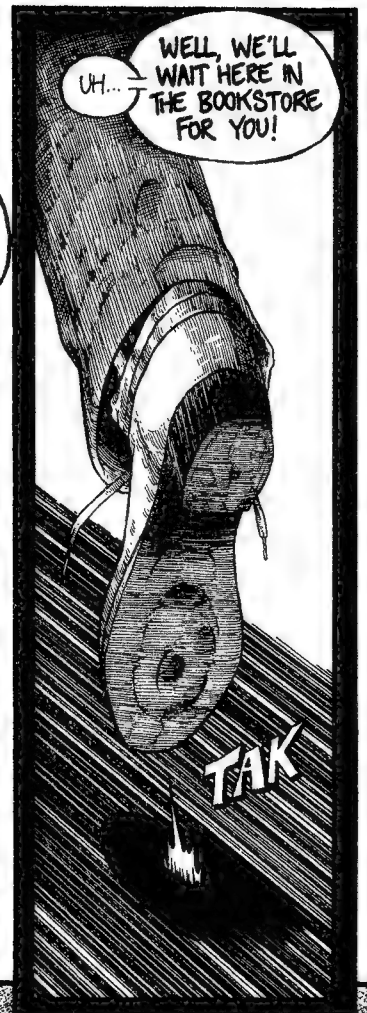








WELL, I THOUGHT I SAW 'EM DOWN THIS WAY...





DEAR **HEPCATS**

7117 WOOD HOLLOW DR., #1728, AUSTIN, TEXAS, 78731

Dear Martin,

It's your friend from overseas again!

I just read **Hepcats** #1 & 2 and what can I say?

Fucking great, Martin, fucking great! End of chat.

That opening sequence of Joey's wishful thinking was nothing short of fucking stunning.

I hadn't looked through the copy of #1 you sent until tonight. I was too tired while I wrote you my other letter for Yo, last night.

It made me wince to read the editorial in the first issue where you stated that Diamond thought the book would appeal to *Omaha* and *Cerebus* fans. These are the two books I compared yours to in my first letter—I guess you must be sick of the comparisons by now. However, as owner of sets of both the aforementioned, I guess they have a point!

Anyway, onto my thoughts on the book, itself.

I've said all I can about issue one's opening twelve-page "silent" sequence. You pulled it off beautifully.

The characters are so real, the way they interact is *disarmingly* real. You're a keen observer of people, Martin, no mistake about it. I've known Gunther all my life, there's one like him waiting round every corner a Joey like me chooses to turn.

The scene where he exposes to Joey the reasons for his discontent with life is so typical of real life. Gunther spoke the truth but Joey still got pissed off at Gunther's arrogance. The tombstone thought balloon was sheer class!

All this together with the end sequence of Joey's frustrations manifesting as feeling patronised by Gunther until a passing girl distracts

him and completely lifts his mood made for an enthralling read and certainly one of the best comics in years.

Issue two introduced us to Arnie and Erica, a couple of intriguing characters. I'd like to say here and now that I *am* Arnie. He behaved exactly how I would (and *have*) throughout this issue.

From his feelings of uneasiness while the flight is landing, through his contempt of Adrian, the potential threat, to his bruised ego because of Erica's absorption in the excitement of the trip—Arnie behaved as I do. I used to have a girlfriend who would almost forget I was there whenever we went out in a group or to new places. I dig how Arnie feels!

The storytelling enhancement techniques of the art in this issue were really clever. The final panel on page seven with the "half" balloons really gave a sensation of how Arnie felt he was superfluous to the proceedings. Everyone else ready to go out on the town and poor old Arnie feeling left out.

The tit-for-tat exchange in the last panel of page eleven was really funny. How many times has someone asked you to explain how you know something is wrong with someone when you can't explain it—you *just know*! Joey's lack of perception would've had me calling him a dork, too, even though I'm sure I've said the same sort of thing as he did when I was younger. His absolute clarity of logic on the subject of Adrian's paintings was hilarious. Such a disregard for pretence was truly refreshing.

I love the way Joey got suckered into the wrestling match. His defeat made him all the more likeable. At least it gave Gunther the chance to straight-talk with Arnie—

this showed what a really thoughtful and good friend Gunther is. The making-up scene between Erica and Arnie at the end was really sweet and provided the perfect ending for another great issue.

Great story, innovative layouts and techniques, superb art and a very personal feel all contribute to what I truly feel is one of my favorite comics of all time. I'm just a sucker for realistic soap opera, Martin.

Well, Martin. That about wraps it up for now. Maybe I'll drop another line when I read **Hepcats** #3, if it comes out before I hear from you, personally. I'll write for sure when you send me Yo.

Take care and reagrd's to Tif. (If you and Tif are Arnie & Erica then we've got a lot in common, Martin!)

IAN MACDONALD
LONDON

*This is only one of several letters Ian has sent. As I told him, at this stage of the game, it's exciting to see copies of **Hepcats** are getting overseas period. We'll worry about quantity later.*

Dear Martin Wagner:

Good premiere issue. Nice "liberal humanistic feel," you should pardon the expression. Nicely literate, too, in a time when we often find the books of many publishers exhibit the greatest creativity in matters of spelling and grammar.

But your "Lansing, IL Fan Search"?

Lansing—well, it's a pretty okay place. I don't know about blue noses, but there are a number of black noses regularly seen across the street from where we once found Friendly Frank's. That is, the Pet Set, a pet store and grooming service, has many canine clients. That's

where I take Maggie, our Airedale terrier.

Your categorizing Lansing as the stronghold of book-burning, mind-policing, fascist doo-doo heads, I just guess that proves all you red-necked, Lone Star beer swillin' yokelbutts, after too many brain degenerating years of inbreeding, don't know nothin' much except how to string up darkies and jump on yore own sisters. W'al, jes' you'ns see if I come awn down for your annual lynching bee, cowboy!

Y'all get the sat-ir-iyakle intentions of the above?

More seriously, prejudging/stereotyping is something we writers have to be careful of. If we see the world's individuals as types, we're probably going to *create* types and not people in our writing.

And all good stories are people stories.

I wish you the best for/with **Hepcats**, think it's a book that can succeed—and that that success will be because of its comic insights into Big Topic: The Human Condition.

Sincerely,

MORT CASTLE
CRETE, IL

W'al, shut mah mouth! Yew Mid-westerners shore do know how t' write sum downright ejjycated letters, sho' nuff! Yee-ha! Wait'll Ah show Beulah Mae!

Y'all get the sat-ir-iyakle intentions of the above?

Dear Martin,

I just read the first issue of **Hepcats** for about the dozenth time, and I am really impressed. If the series maintains itself at the level established at the outset (not that I'm suggesting it won't) then it should receive a couple of nominations next year in the best new series category. I sincerely hope your little publishing venture succeeds, because I would like to be reading **Hepcats** for a long time to come.

Three things struck me immediately about the book. First, and foremost, the concept is good and



solid. This is a "slice of life" series, if I'm not mistaken, and there just aren't enough of them around these days. This is probably because it's easier to be creatively lazy and lard down a book with slugfests, posturing, and action sequences while sparingly portioning out those hard to write things like the "slice of life." But you have turned it around and used the "easy to write" things for subtle yet devastating effect.

This was particularly brought home to me by your use of violence. The dungeon scene early on in the book is pure fantasy, and is portrayed as a daydream. (I expect it probably upset some people, since there seems to be an ultrasensitivity nowadays as regards misogyny, so let me go on record as saying that a lot of that comes from taking things out of context.) Later on in the story a real bit of violence occurs when Joey accidentally boks the dogfaced

dude on the back of the head with a cue ball. But instead of having a fight, which the fantasy sequence could have suggested a predisposition towards, Joey bends over backwards to avoid trouble. Isn't that just like real life! We're attracted to violence in fiction, when it isn't real, but when it is real all we want is to find a way out.

The second thing that impressed me was your wonderful art. So much of what passes for good black-and-white art these days is simply passable color art that nobody has bothered to color—which, of course, will be colored later on if the series is a hit and is collected into a book form. But **Hepcats** has real black-and-white art and should never be colored, much like *Cerebus*, *Concrete*, and *Lone Wolf and Cub*. This probably takes you a lot of time and effort, but, as someone once said, anything worth doing is worth

doing right.

Finally, I found the script, when there finally was one (that's not a complaint), to be very true. As an editor for *Comics Interview* I have become acutely familiar with the spoken word over the years, and with the problems of rendering it in ink. Joey and Gunther "sound" just like real people to me, and that's nothing to sneeze at.

So, keep up the good work, I'll be rooting for you!

DARREL L. BOATZ
MACOMB, IL

*I agree with you about people taking things out of context (after all, as I'm sure you could tell, there was no misogyny involved in Joey's daydream sequence). But the affectation for violence in contemporary escapist fiction bothers me, too, and not because it's unsettling or offensive or child-corrupting or any of that alarmist crap—I'm not a squeamish person—but because so much of it is perfunctory, pointless and pornographic (hey-ey, I'm alliterating now!), existing simply to shock and excite rather than to serve the story in any way. A perfect example in comics would be—well, damn near everything DC publishes. DC's—and for the most part, Marvel/Epic's—idea of what makes a "mature" comic for "discriminating adults," is, "How many disembowelings, decapitations, and bare tits can we cram on a single page?" (Either that, or it's incomprehensibly artsy-fartsy in a pseudo-RAW style, like the stuff *Piranha* is doing.) Few of these books pay the least attention to dynamics of storytelling, pacing, dramatic tension, characterization, or narrative consistency.*

The public buys into violence in entertainment so readily because violence is portrayed as the easiest and most ego-gratifying (I mean, what red-blooded manly-man wouldn't like to kick ass as smoothly as James Bond?) way to solve any problem. Amazing how, for years, the U.S. couldn't accomplish a thing in Viet Nam, and then Rambo flies over and

*wins the entire fucking war single-handedly in 100 minutes. And smart people buy into this claptrap, too. A very bright and talented author friend of mine once criticized an intriguing science fiction novel called *The Rainbow Cadenza* on the grounds that he thought the heroine could have gotten out of her predicament most easily by "getting a gun and blowing everyone's dicks off," unable as he was to accept that the novel was drawing allegorical parallels with our own society and that for her to have done that would have been as effective—and believable—as a disillusioned vet storming the Pentagon all by himself with a hunting rifle. People simply don't want to see realistic situations portrayed believably in their entertainment. If they did, I guess Harvey Pekar would be a zillionaire.*

*Anyway—the rest of you—Darrel's recently interviewed me for *Comics Interview*, so I'll keep you posted on when that issue will be out.*

Dear Martin,

When I saw **Hepcats**, I say to myself, "All right, annudder funny animal title" (I'm a sucker for them). I read and enjoyed it. Though not exactly a blockbuster, a damn good read nevertheless.

Time: August first. Location: San Diego Comic Con—artists ghetto and what do my eyes show me, but a nervous "con virgin" selling his wares. Enter the established funny animal artist and comic book publisher. Yes, you surprised the hell out of me by being there. But you survived the onslaught of 9000 fanboys, 80 or so *Desert Peach* fanatics and 15 Barr Warriors and hordes of Rowrbrazzers (when I throw a party, I throw a party). Therefore you passed the test, you survived. Welcome to the world of alternate press. And now book two is out. Ah N'awlins. Fond memories of the World Con last year (a total disaster). And Erica turns out to be an exotic dancer—woof! And poor Joey. Why is it that I never saw that sort of activity? But

#2 turned out real fine and I eagerly await #3. Guess that means I love it. I do!

Hasta le by-by,

JIM GROAT
GRAPHXPRESS
TUCSON, AZ

"Annudder funny animal title..." An udder funny animal title! Good one, Jim! Good one! Guess you passed the test, too!

Dear Martin,

I just finished reading **Hepcats** 1 & 2, and I thought they were pretty darn swell. Double Diamond is right—this book is a natural for *Cerebus* and *Omaha* fans. I really enjoy both of them, and **Hepcats** was like meeting an old friend for the first time.

I find myself agreeing with Chris Roberson—yes, **Hepcats** style is reminiscent of *Omaha*, but, equally true, the art is original and the stories are **Hepcats** own. I'm a little uncomfortable with the comparisons to *Omaha*, which seem to me to be based on the fact that each has an exotic dancer for a main character. I think this focus on how much alike or different the two books are obscures the fact that both *Omaha* and **Hepcats** belong to a larger genre: that of anthropomorphics (God, I hope I spelt that right). When **Hepcats** is considered along with *Cerebus*, *Fusion*, *Captain Jack*, *Sam and Max* and *Dr. Watchstop*, as well as those brave souls, *The Weasel Patrol*, I think it is easier to see the wide range of possibilities with funny-animal books (it was easier to say that than attempt the A-word again) and the originality of **Hepcats** stands out more.

Thus, in this spirit, you will find a check for \$11.00 enclosed for one of the few remaining copies of **Yo!** I'll be looking forward to reading it.

Best wishes,

MOIRA MEGAN HARTWELL
DETROIT

P.S.—I just saw the circulation figure—3800?! Can this be

possible? Cripes, how do you manage to keep it going? And where are all those adult comic book readers with the sophisticated and mature tastes? I mean, c'mon, there's got to be more than 3800 of us. Let's hope that some of those thousands of *Cerebus* fans get the word, soon!

P.P.S.—"Tifanie Asleep" was lovely—now *that's* what I call a back cover illustration.

Never fear, Moira. Low orders are standard for a brand new black-and-white—especially from a new independent publisher, and especially these days; in fact, 3000 is average independent circulation right now. Sobers ya up, huh? As for the thousands of Cerebus fans, they'll get the word before too long; Dave has requested an eight-page Hepcats back-up section for it.

Dear Martin Wagner,

You don't see too many down to earth characters in comics these days. It's hard to relate to superheroes or seemingly indestructible people. It's easier to relate to people or events that are nearer to our own lives.

Your characters help us remember. Who can forget Mardi Gras. The throngs of humanity, from college partiers, to women mud wrestlers, to soul savers. Best of all was the friendship. Endless toasts with Hurricanes at O'Brien's remembering old times or trying to coax women out of their bras. Those were the days.

Thanks for being one of us.

Sincerely,

GREG CUNNINGHAM
ALEXANDRIA, VA

P.S. I'm glad to hear your comments to Eric Martin's letter. I'm for funny political cartoons, but as long as they are both ways. Keep up the great work.

P.P.S. Congratulations on your marriage to Tif. Good luck on a happy marriage.

Ah, yes. Nothing like remembering

old times, good times, special friends. By the way, Tif (my little Bourbon St. rat) says any guy who thinks he can coax a woman out of her bra in New Orleans is out of his mind, but having only been to Mardi Gras once, I can tell you it's eeeeasy—provided they're up on the balconies. Just yell, "Show us your tits! Show us your tits!" And throw beads.

Hey Martin.

Just picked up **Hepcats** #1 (a mere three months after its release apparently) and although I haven't come across #2 yet, I'm sure I'll find it somewhere. Actually, I guess #3 should be out there by now too

people for no good, logical, literarily defendable reason. We just like them, that's all. When I read a piece of criticism about a book which the reviewer considers to be quite effective and entertaining, but can't understand why the artist didn't just use humans "...which would have been simpler and just as effective," I sigh and shake my head. As far as I'm concerned, anthropomorphics does not need to be defended on the basis of allegory, shorthand personality definition, or any of the other thousand-and-one (occasionally legitimate) excuses commonly cited. When asked, Reed [Waller] explains that the use of cuddly animals allows one to feel more deeply for the char-

THE LEGACY OF FRIENDLY FRANK'S? OR, "MY GOD, IT MUST BE SUBLIMINAL!"

NUMBER OF ISSUES OF 'HEPCATS' SO FAR: 4
OF COVERS ON WHICH ARNIE IS EMBRACING ERICA: 2
OF COVERS WITH BEDS ON THEM: 2
INSTANCES WHERE THE TWO EVENTS ARE RELATED: 1

shouldn't it. Is DD Press behind schedule, or is this simply the usual consequence of living in the midwest?

Although I'd never heard of your work until the ads started showing up in assorted mags, I'm glad to see that the strip already seems to have had a decent following. Hopefully, this will help to make the zine successful during this rather bleak time for anthropomorphics. The quality of your humor and storytelling should be more than enough to gain loyalty from the readership; the unfortunate obstacle is getting people to pick it up in the first place. This was not a factor with myself since I'll try anything dealing with animal-folks by reflex alone. Having drawn these characters for as long as you have, you've likely come in contact with enough of my type by now to know that there is a basic difference in perception involved. Though we may not number in the millions, there is still a large crowd of people like myself who are attracted to critter-

acters, and turns the sex scenes from acts of vulgar exploitation to ones of tenderness and innocent joy (not his words exactly, but the basic gist...). [Steve] Gallacci says that he couldn't draw humans convincingly. The bulk of morph artists, when asked, simply shrug their shoulders and mumble something about watching a lot of cartoons as a kid. Why should one have to justify one's feelings in the matter? Maybe there actually is some deep underlying psychological reason after all, but I don't expect every person who happens to be partial to blonds to explain themselves, and I don't think I should be expected to either.

Still awake? Sorry, but that's been pestering me lately. Anyway, I'm sure you don't intend to suddenly start putting human heads on your characters in order to satisfy some bitching non-morph dink, so I'll just move on to some words of appreciation now.

Joey in the lecture hall is about the closest representation of myself

in class that I've ever seen: clothes, notes (or non-notes as the case may be), facial expression, posture, desperate attempts to remain conscious and, er...distractions. Though I haven't met the rest of the cast as of yet I think I can safely say that he's going to be my favorite character. That toothy, embarrassed grin pretty much gets the point across without need for verbiage (and I can't help but suspect that you enjoy drawing it too).

It would be nice to see a little more deeply into the roots of the story, so if it's not too late I'll take a **Yo**. I'm in an iffy situation with my current dwelling, not to mention the fact that it comes equipped with a ridiculously tiny mail-box, so please send the book to the address at the bottom of the page instead of my own. That way I'll be certain to get it eventually (again, if there [are] any left to send), and without heavy folds and creases.

So take it easy Martin, and keep drawing 'till the money runs out, or you're too rich to bother with such things anymore. I guarantee you'll sell at least one of each issue...if I can get a little cooperation from the locals that is (only one shop in town, run by a Marvel-phile who considers it practically sacrilegious to order anything without a superhero in it).

DAN MATTHES
TOPEKA, KS

*"Because I feel like it," is usually the answer I give to the why-use-animals question. And I'll never be too rich to want to quit doing **Hepcats**.*

Yo, Martin!

Hey, **Hepcats** is great! I'm glad to see another quality product hit the stands; I was beginning to despair of ever finding good stuff after the Great B&W Crash. *Adventures of Captain Jack*, *Menagerie*, *Space Ark*, and lots of other good stuff bit the dust; the only thing that's kept me going 'till now has been *Omaha the Cat Dancer* (by you-know-who!) and Steven Gallacci's *Albedo* (yeah, I have

a weakness for funny-animal comics, but hey...). Add **Hepcats** to the list of "can't-do-withouts"; hope it has a long future ahead of it.

It's probably a little late (actually it's a *lot* late) to congratulate you and Tifanie on your wedding, but **Hepcats** #2 didn't even hit the stands up here in Rockford until this past month. Good luck to you both, anyway. Better late than never, eh?

Whoops, wait a sec... Rockford, as in Rockford, Illinois?? Yeah, that's right. *Then howcome you've got a Florida return address?* Well, due to a series of circumstances much too complicated to explain I don't have a permanent address here in Rockford yet, even though I've been here almost two months now, so I'm just letting the post office earn their 25 cents a shot and forward everything from my old address. Amazingly enough, so far they haven't lost anything... Of course, if they had, I wouldn't know about it, would I? Oh well, such is life...

Actually, I don't wonder too much about what kind of comic would print the logo on the bottom... I do wonder about what kind of comic would print the second issue *side-ways*... *"Totally different comic, man... Totally."*

How many other Illinois-based letters have you gotten? I know Rockford is controlled by the hyper-conservatives... I went in to get *Omaha* #12 the other day and I figured it would probably be behind the counter; would you believe they keep it *back in the stockroom*?!! The guy brings it out from the back, holding it face-down, quickly slips it between two other comics I was carrying, and mumbles to me—and I kid you not!—"Don't let anyone see this; if the city council finds out we sell this we'll probably end up out of business." Pardon my language here, but *Christ on a crutch!* I figured that a smaller city like this would be more conservative than Tampa (of which Oldsmar is about three miles from); but that's getting just a little *extreme*, in my opinion. Kind of makes me wonder how my own series, *Solarfox*,

is gonna be received (possibly never available sometime next year, God and the IRS willing!); it's a funny-animal sci-fi series and while it mostly focusses (*dammit, I have got to get out of the habit of using those British spellings!*) on the sci-fi story itself there are some interpersonal relationships going on as running subplots, and even a certain amount of "discreet copulation", as you put it. Oh, well, the hell with all of 'em; I'm gonna write and draw *Solarfox* however I please; let 'em run me out of town on a rail if they dare.

Lookin' forward to *Snowblind*—what's the significance of the title, anyway? No, never mind, don't tell me... It'll probably spoil the suspense... But if the story is gonna run for eighteen issues, you'd better be sure to keep Double Diamond Press above water long enough to get to issue #20! I *hate* it when a series goes out of business halfway through a story...

You know, I was sitting here reading the two issues again, and something kept bugging me about the artwork... I finally figured it out; your characters all have *five fingers*! I know, bitch bitch bitch, right? Well, it's just one of those things that just kept nagging at me. Oh well. I *love* the artwork; I wish I could draw detailed backgrounds like that! Must take you *hours* to do those panels. My own stuff's pretty minimalist; God help me, I've been influenced too heavily by Marvel/DC (another thing that's slowing up the works; no one I've showed *Solarfox* to has complained too much, but I think it looks like hell!) Geez, you and Steve Gallacci together make me feel so inadequate...

Geez, you went from 6,000 (issue #1) to 3,800 (issue #2) that quickly? Either you're losing your shirt, or Port Publications must not be too expensive, for you to get away with such a small print run! Or is that just a subscription count?

Was gonna order **Yo**, but I wasn't sure if you had any left or not! If you do, please hold one for me and drop me a quick line to let me know;

I'll shoot the 11 bucks out to you as soon as I hear from you.

Well, anyway. Keep up the great work, and say *Hey!* to the **Hepcats** gang for me!

Y'jin Quap'je! (Klingonese for "Survive and succeed")

GARY AKINS JR.
ROCKFORD, IL
(OLDSMAR, FL)

P.S.—Speaking of the artwork...do you *sell* original art, by any chance?

I'll probably start selling originals early next year. I need to get some pages reshot, and I need to set up Double Diamond so that it accepts plastic. (These pages ain't cheap.) Then I'll be ready. I'll put a note in the back of Hepcats when it's time.

You know, Omaha gained so many readers from being involved in the anti-Constitutional Friendly Frank's travesty, I'm sure that despite the fact it's hard to find the book in some areas, their circulation is quite nice. (Fellow Kitchen Sink-er Doug Potter tells me 20,000-something.) Kind of like the obscure heavy-metal outfit W.A.S.P. getting a major record label deal after Tipper Gore quoted some of their more profane lyrics in front of the Senate.

Dear Martin,

I found a copy of **Hepcats** #2, almost by accident. It was quite a good effort, and as a number of my favorite titles have been dropping like flies recently I've decided to write and pledge my support for your very promising book. Enclosed is a check for a copy of **Yo**, as well as an extra two bucks on the off chance that you have a spare copy of **Hepcats** #1 available. If not, well then I guess you get to keep the two bucks and it's my loss. Oh well.

Good luck!

TOM BREVOORT
BEAR, DE

Thanks for the pledge. And I wouldn't dream of keeping your two bucks.

Hey Martin!

As you can see, this is a rather

spur of the moment letter, but after reading **Hepcats** #3, I realize I have to get **Yo**!! The art is fantabulous and your stories about real college life are truly human. As a writer, I can relate to that level. You have a great book, so don't go away! So...Please send me **Yo**! Enclosed is my eleven (11) dollars. Thank you very much.

Take it easy and take care.
Keep it up!

Your friend,

STEPHEN LANGLOIS
ORLANDO, FL

Dear Martin (No Relation to Matt Not That It Matters Because It's Comparing Apples to Oranges) Wagner,

I must qualify this letter with a *Penthouse* "Forum"-esque type opening—"I have never written to a publication like yours before." In fact, I have never written to any publication at all, and was comfortable in my silent-fan-mode apathy. Until **Hepcats** #3. I cried. I laughed. I reread. And again. This is what literature is. Not only because you deal with humans (rhino, lion, black, white, Asian—we all have opposable thumbs) and their inherent humanity. But because you have a style (artistic) which compliments the content of the story beautifully. Page 7 where Arnie, alone in the hospital, asks "What was the bad news?" (By now I hope I know.) He is caged by the grill-like pattern of the ceiling and floortiles, isolated, in desperate need of comfort, and the worst is yet to come. Devastating. Magnificent. Page 16 as four panels and one full page are devoted to depicting one of the most trivial acts imaginable, while we eavesdrop on a conversation of utmost sensitivity between best friends. The contrast of the image to the text sharply emphasizes the emotional interplay between the two characters. (One gripe though—the nether regions below a clothes washer are never that pristine!) I could continue in this vein, citing the three opening pages, the final page, the use of white during Erica's narration, but I think you get my point. **Hepcats** is the best I've seen since

Watchmen, and it may transcend.

However, I do have a reservation. With no evidence to the contrary, I assume that Erica is narrating this whole story to herself in her coma—you know, life flashing before eyes and all that. Even if otherwise, I still wonder about the point of view in this story. How does she know all this stuff that happens when she isn't around? You could say that the way comics point of views [sic] work differs from either simply prose p.o.v. and/or art p.o.v. and is similar to motion picture p.o.v. That doesn't satisfy me completely because comics are still called "books" and are read and mentally processed like books, and as such, I believe some basic stylistic and literary forms should be followed. As comics become more sophisticated, the debate on the nature of the comic as an art form should (I hope) reach the intellectual level of, say, Joycean analysis and criticism of Post-Modernism.

Anyway, I have this tendency to get overly academic at times (no kidding!), so congratulations to the (lovely) bride and yourself and best of luck and so on.

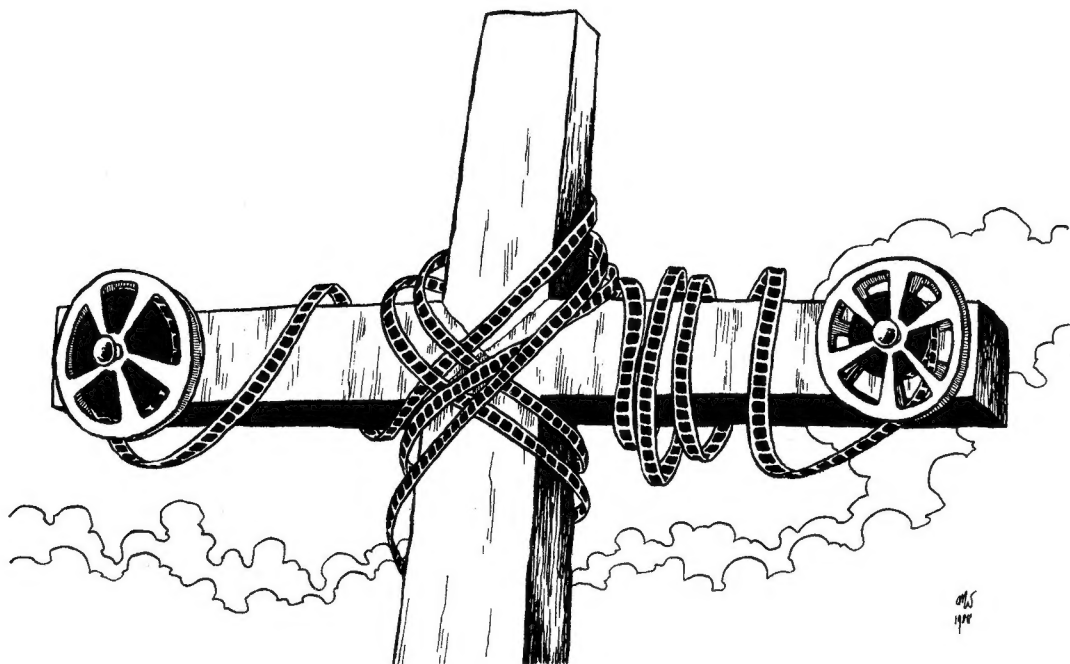
Thank you for **Hepcats**. Word.

CHRIS SHORB
SANTA BARBARA, CA

I disagree with one point you made: comics are sophisticated as hell. It's only that virtually no one drawing comics today is utilizing the artform's sophistication to its fullest potential, what with the status quo being maintained by corporate colossi who give a shit for art or even entertainment and focus on unit sales alone. I also think that to tell stories strikingly in any field sometimes involves getting your audience to readjust some of its preconceptions. When Erica comes in to narrate, she's doing so somewhat apart from the story, filling in gaps for you and making confusing flashback transitions smoother. It's no shame to be overly academic, Chris; your cryptic closing paragraph, however, has got me head-scratching.

ART FROM EDITORIAL HELL

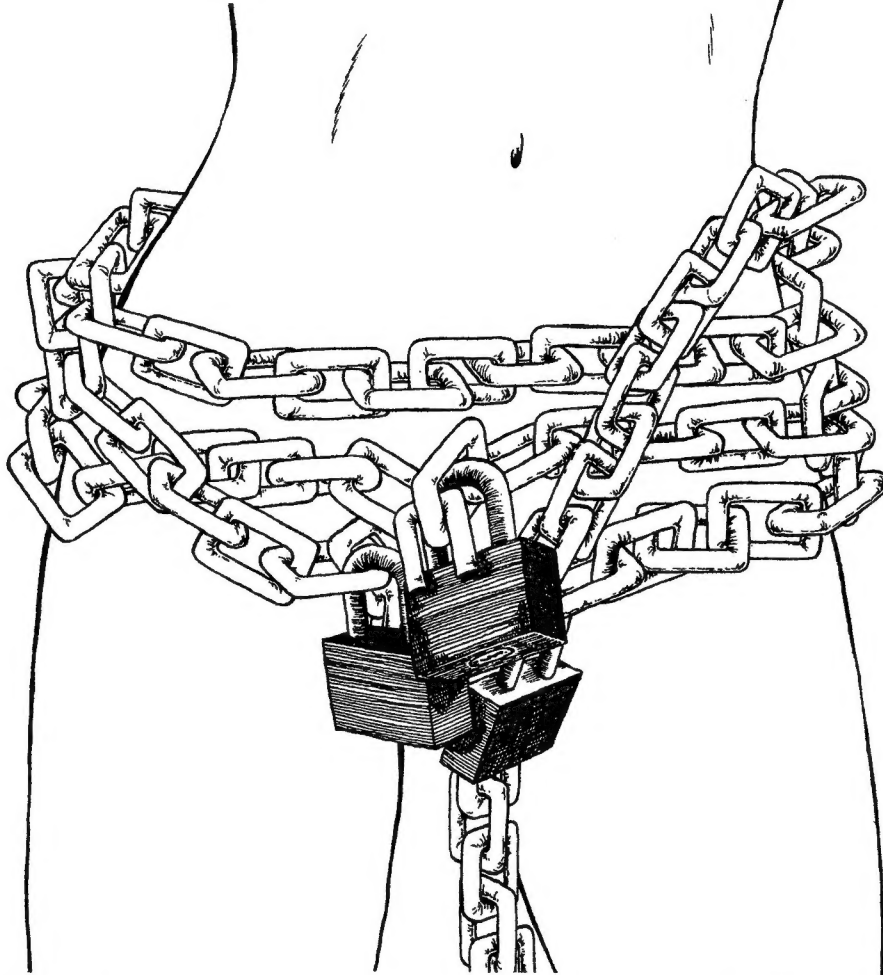
The summer of 1988 was a very busy time for me at the *Texan*. The need to raise gobs of cash in order to fund the publication of *Yo* essentially led me to whore myself to the editorial page, doubling my weekly paycheck by doing sometimes three cartoons a week. Some of these, however, I'm quite proud of, so I thought I'd save the best ones from oblivion and show them to you.



This one's my absolute fave-rave; it's easily the drawing I worked the hardest on for the editorial page. In general, my editorial page cartoons were illustrations to columns as opposed to your basic editorial cartoon, which I hate doing. This one decorated the letters column on a day when we were for some reason bombarded by mail—mainly from pissed-off Campus Crusade types—about Scorsese's movie *The Last Temptation of Christ*.



Everybody loved this one. The drawing was combined post-camera with a photo I grabbed at random from the sports office's file cabinet. In fact, this was reprinted in *U.*, a monthly tabloid collecting material from college papers nationwide and assembling them into a sort of collegiate *USA Today*. Whether or not having your work appear in *U.* is an honor, as its editors claim, the relevant fact is that they pay well. The editorial here suggested that college athletes should get paid. Apparently the guy who wrote it has never heard of SMU. (That's a joke.)



▲ This eye-catching piece (no pun intended) went with a column suggesting—are you ready?—that prostitution ought to be legalized. While I don't want to shock any of you (especially you, mom), I must say I don't altogether disagree with this sentiment. However, the woman (that's right) who wrote this piece had some ludicrously faulty reasoning. Anyway, to my immense surprise, though the column generated an amazing amount of mail (mainly of the God-I-can't-believe-you-printed-that variety), no one responded to the drawing.

▼ This column—and my drawing—blasted a (non-UT) professor who published a GGG-rated version of *Mother Goose* after his daughter had a nightmare about the Three Blind Mice getting their tails lopped off. Pretty white thing for the old boy to do, if you ask me. For one nauseating example, the couplet “They all ran after the farmer’s wife/She cut off their tails with a carving knife” was changed to “They all came out for a piece of cheese/I gave it to them when they asked me please.” Other nursery rhymes were similarly bowdlerized. Feel free to puke up blood.

**IT'S HERE! IT'S
NEW! IT'S**

Mommy Goose®

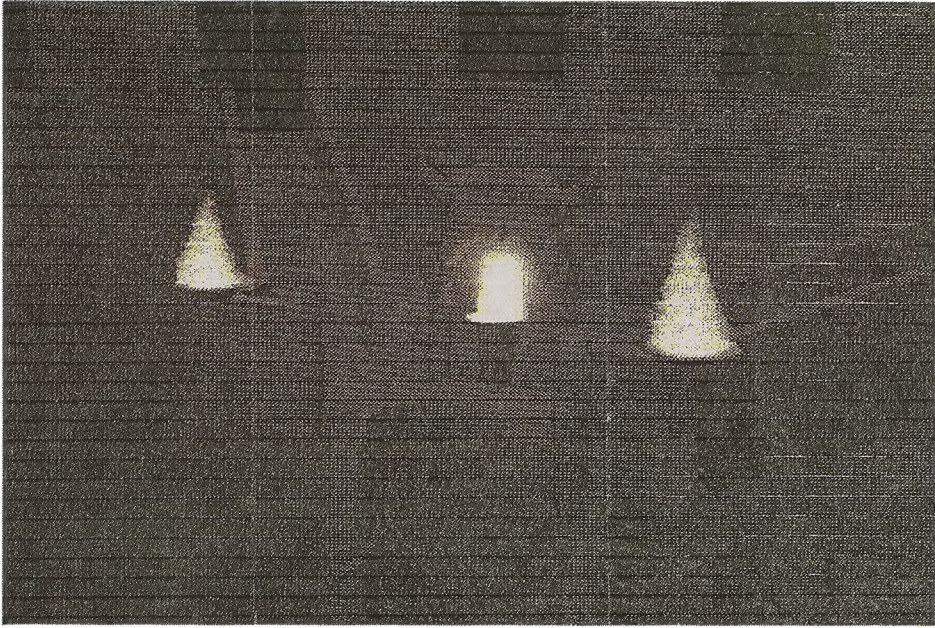
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Steven
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Notice: This book is printed on 100% acid-free paper, so that your family may enjoy it for generations without wear and tear. We hope this is a consolation to the millions of woodland creatures we gassed in order to destroy the trees necessary to meet our print run.

DOUBLE
DIAMOND
PRESS



Cool-lookin' 3-D computer renderings of the dungeon scene in Hepcats I, generated by Paul S. Ripley, Santa Cruz, California.

